

Public Health Fact Sheet

Mumps



What is mumps?

Mumps is an acute viral disease characterized by fever, swelling and tenderness of one or more of the salivary glands, including the parotid gland located just below the front of the ear.

How is mumps spread?

Mumps is transmitted by direct contact with saliva and discharges from the nose and throat of infected individuals.

What are the symptoms of mumps?

Symptoms of mumps include fever, headache, muscle aches, tiredness and loss of appetite followed by swelling and tenderness of one or more of the salivary glands, usually the parotid gland (located just below the front of the ear). Approximately one-third of infected people do not have apparent salivary gland swelling.

How soon after infection do symptoms occur?

The incubation period is usually 16 to 18 days, although it may vary from 12 to 25 days.

What complications have been associated with mumps?

Severe complications are rare. However, mumps can cause inflammation of the brain and/or tissue covering the brain and spinal cord (encephalitis/meningitis), inflammation of the testicles (orchitis), inflammation of the ovaries (oophoritis) and/or breasts (mastitis), spontaneous abortion and deafness, which is usually permanent.

When and for how long is a person able to spread mumps?

Mumps is contagious three days prior to and nine days after the onset of symptoms.

Does past infection with mumps make a person immune?

Yes. Immunity acquired after contracting the disease is usually long term.

Is there a vaccine for mumps?

Yes. The mumps vaccine, which is contained in the MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine, can prevent this disease. One dose of mumps vaccine will be effective in approximately 80 percent of people vaccinated, but two doses of mumps vaccine will be effective in approximately 90 percent of people. Therefore, two doses are better at preventing mumps than one dose. If you do not know if you have been vaccinated or had mumps disease diagnosed by a physician, vaccination is recommended.

What can be done to prevent the spread of mumps?

The single most effective control measure is maintaining the highest possible level of immunization in the community. Persons diagnosed with mumps should remain at home during their infectious period (until after five days after onset of symptoms).

Other things people can do to prevent mumps and other infections are to wash their hands well and often with soap or an alcohol-based hand gel, and to teach children to wash their hands too. Eating utensils should not be shared and surfaces that are frequently touched should also be regularly cleaned with soap and water, or with cleaning wipes.